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FACTS ABOUT WESTMORELAND HOMESTEADS

Department of Agriculture
Farm Security Administration

OFFICIAL NAME: Westmoreland Homesteads

LOCATION: In Westmoreland County, southwest Pennsylvania, 8 miles south of Greensburg, the county seat; and 38 miles south-east of Pittsburgh. Project Headquarters: Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

HISTORY OF PROJECT: Initiated by the Division of Subsistence Homesteads of the Department of the Interior, October, 1933. Transferred to the Resettlement Administration by Executive Order, May 15, 1935. Final approval, November 16, 1935. Construction started in January, 1934. About one-third of the development was completed under the prior agency.

PURPOSE OF PROJECT: This project was established as a subsistence homestead cooperative agricultural community to rehabilitate former mining families, who were stranded when mining operations in the vicinity were discontinued or seriously curtailed. These 254 families moved into small farm homes. Here they are attempting to secure social and economic stability, by raising their food at home to supplement their cash income from employment in trade or cooperative organizations.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: The project covers 1,353 acres of land of limestone soil considered excellent for general farming. Although each of the 254 homestead units averages only 2.25 acres of land, homesteaders also operate a cooperative farm of 615 acres. Cooperative farm operations include the raising of hogs, poultry, and dairy cows, and the growing of small grains and ensilage.

Industrial enterprises will employ family heads and other adult members of the group. Other cooperative enterprises include a brooder plant, an incubator house, a dairy barn, and a cooperative trading post. A remodeled existing farm is being used as a temporary community center; its remodeled barn serving as a temporary school, until the project school is completed. The construction of the community center is nearly completed.

More than 50% of the family heads have found outside employment which gives them additional cash income. Others are engaged in construction work on the project. Patronage dividends from cooperative enterprises also increases the homesteaders' income. All the homesteaders raise the major part of their food supplies.

HOUSE DESCRIPTION: The project has 246 new frame houses of four, five and six rooms and five remodeled existing farm houses. 251 new garages and poultry houses were also built. Each unit has a grape arbor. A community water system is completed, and each homestead has a septic tank and a tile disposal field. A private company supplies electricity. Roads are under construction.

HOMESTEADERS: Homesteaders were selected from a group of 1,574 applicants. Preference was given families with children and families with garden or farming experience. For 12 months prior to application, 37% of the homesteaders had a cash income which ranged between \$600 and \$1,000, 30% had less than \$600 and 9% had over \$1400 annual income. More than two-thirds of the homesteaders had received some relief usually over a period of a year or more, and 84% were without cash savings.

The survey, based on a study of 224 accepted families, showed an average of 5.5 persons per family and 3.3 children -- a total population of 1,224. The average age of the family head was between 30 and 40 years. More than three-quarters of the family heads were born in Pennsylvania, but 15 per cent were born in Europe. Of the eight college people, only one person had completed the four year course. Approximately 22% of the families had completed eight grades of elementary school, while 45 families had had four years of grade school or less, and 30 had completed a high school course.

The experience of the family heads fell into two main groups -- manufacturing and mechanical industries and mining. More than 35% of the men had formerly been miners, but were forced to take factory work with the closing of the mines. The statistics at the time of application showed 50% of the men engaged in manufacturing and mechanical industries, and 20% in mining. Approximately half were unskilled physical laborers and the remainder were semi-skilled.

The usual occupation of the wives was house-work, but 45 women had engaged in personal service work and others had done sales and clerical work.

The homesteaders in general had had previous farming experience, mostly in general or truck farming.

